C H A P T E R 1 0

B R I D G E S

1) BRIDGE ADMINISTRATION

Bridges in the Eleventh Coast Guard District are administered by the Bridge Section of the Aids To Navigation and Waterway Management Branch, located on Coast Guard Island, Alameda, California. The Coast Guard has authority over bridge location, clearances, construction activities, navigation lights, and drawbridge operation. Questions regarding bridge operations, information about or violations of bridge regulations, and bridge permit applications should be directed to:

Commander (oan-2)
Eleventh Coast Guard District
Coast Guard Island
Bldg 50-3
Alameda, CA 94501-5100
(510) 437-3514

2) BRIDGE CLEARANCES

Clearances are shown on navigational charts published by the National Ocean Service (NOS). Bridge vertical clearances are referenced to Mean High Water (MHW) and are listed in the measurement unit for the chart, either feet or meters. Some charts also show vertical clearances over Mean Lower Low Water. Bridge horizontal clearances depict the distance between the faces of bridge piers (or fender systems, if installed), measured normal to the channel. Contact the Bridge Section for bridge clearances on waterways without navigational charts (e.g. the Colorado River). Regularly operated drawbridges and some fixed bridges have vertical clearance gauges installed. Mariners may see the actual clearance available without reference to tide tables. Mariners should know the vertical clearance requirement of their vessel and avoid requesting drawbridge openings if they can safely transit the closed bridge. Vessel appurtenances, such as radio antennas and bimini tops, which are not essential for navigation, should be lowered to avoid unneeded drawbridge openings.

3) BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES

Bridge construction activities which temporarily interfere with drawbridge operation or bridge clearances are published in the Local Notice to Mariners or may be advertised in a Broadcast Notice to Mariners.

4) BRIDGE NAVIGATION LIGHTS AND SIGNALS

Bridges crossing waterways with significant nighttime navigation are marked with navigation lights. In general, the bridge piers are marked with fixed red lights, the centers of the fixed bridges are marked with fixed green lights, and movable bridges have span lights which show red when the bridge is closed and green when it is open. Bridges crossing waterways with significant commercial vessel traffic may also have fog signals or racons. Fog signals and racons are shown on the nautical charts and in the Coast Guard Light List. Please report any light, fog horn or racon outages to the nearest Coast Guard unit.

5) DRAWBRIDGE OPERATING REGULATIONS

With the availability of all drawbridge regulations on the Internet and in hard copy from the Government Printing Office, redundant publication by the Coast Guard has been discontinued.

Mariners may access “33 Code of Federal Regulations 117 Subpart B”, Drawbridge Regulations via the Internet at http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html. Follow the directions for a key word search. The regulations are arranged alphabetically be state.

The regulations are also available through your local public library, various marinas and chandlerly/marine stores, or directly from the government Printing Office in Washington, DC.

You may contact the Coast Guard by telephone at (510) 437-3514 between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, if additional information is needed.

Many drawbridges in California have special operating regulations, and are not attended at all times. The prudent mariner will check the drawbridge regulations, and the Local Notice to Mariners (for temporary changes) before transiting drawbridges. These regulations may also be found in Chapter 2, Part 117 of Coast Pilot 7.

6) DRAWBRIDGE SIGNALS

Mariners must request drawbridge openings using the signals prescribed in 33 CFR 117. There are three types of signals that may be used: sound signals, visual signals, or radiotelephone signals.

Sound Signals

Most drawbridges in California (except those in Los Angeles Harbor) use the standard signal prescribed in 33 CFR 117.15: One prolonged blast (4-6 seconds) followed by one short blast (1 second) sounded within a reasonable hearing distance of the bridge. The drawtender will respond in kind, unless the draw cannot be opened, in which case, 5 short blasts will be sounded.

Visual Signals

A white flag raised and lowered vertically; or a white, amber, or green light raised and lowered vertically.

When the drawbridge can be opened immediately, the drawtender will respond with a white flag by day or a white, amber or green light at night raised and lowered vertically in full sight of the vessel;

When the draw cannot be opened immediately, or is open and must be closed promptly, the drawtender will respond with a red flag or red light swung back and forth horizontally in full sight of the vessel. This signal will be repeated until acknowledged in some manner by the requesting vessel.

Radiotelephone Signals

Many drawbridges in California are equipped with VHF-FM marine radiotelephones. When the request for an opening and its response is communicated by radiotelephone, visual or sound signals need not be used. Both mariner and drawtender must continue to monitor the selected channels until the vessel has cleared the draw. If radiotelephone contact cannot be maintained, sound or visual signals shall be used. Radiotelephone communications are to be initiated on the working frequency, normally Channel 9 in northern California and Channel 13 in southern California. The following matrix lists the drawbridges which have radiotelephones together with their call sign, working frequency, location, and the citation of their special operating regulation.

Special notes: When a vessel approaches a drawbridge with the draw in the open position, the vessel shall give the opening signal and if no acknowledgment is received then may proceed through with caution. When two or more vessels are approaching the same drawbridge at the same time whether approaching from the same or opposite directions, each vessel shall signal the drawtender independently. When using a portable air horn be sure you are close enough to the drawbridge for the drawtender to hear the request signal.